

Sermon – April 7, 2024 - EASTER 2 Pastor Ventura  
Easter Makes a Difference  
Acts 4:32–37

Grace and peace from our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Easter Sunday may be over for this year, but Easter is not. Our church year gives us six more Sundays of the Easter season. But even that is not enough; every Sunday is a “little” Easter. Christians worship on Sundays because Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week.

So, Easter still matters in the church calendar, but what difference does it make in our lives? Easter Sunday can certainly create an emotional high—great music, packed churches. Wow! We can all get excited about that, but how about this Sunday? Or the next? Pretty soon we’re back to the same old, same old.

So, what difference does Easter make—for you? The reading from the book of Acts this morning shows us how indeed Easter makes a difference in the lives of those who believe it. And this morning I’m focusing on the remaining of the chapter, verses 36-37. Once again hear the whole reading: “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.<sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.<sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold<sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.<sup>36</sup> Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus,<sup>37</sup> sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

Easter sure does make a difference in people lives, doesn't it. Take Joseph in our text, for example. The difference was so marked that the apostles begun to call him Barnabas. And this is why, he liked to encourage

people not just with words but with deeds too. That's what Barnabas means: "Son of encouragement."

Joseph now called Barnabas, was an encourager. He built people up. He gave of himself to take care of others. He supported those who were all alone. He was a "son of encouragement" indeed.

Now, was it a change of his name, or maybe just a nick name, perhaps. But it was really a great name to have. Barnabas, the encourager. And that is a name or nickname all of us could have, don't you think so? All of us can be encouragers, just like Joseph from Cyprus. You can say, call me Barnabas. Yes, that's got a wonderful ring to it!

So how did Joseph become Barnabas, the encourager? Look at verse 33, and you'll see the key to his new name: "And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."

The name Barnabas is a resurrection name. He becomes the encourager because of the power of Jesus' resurrection. He encourages people because Jesus' resurrection has brought grace to his life. Easter does make a difference indeed! But Jesus' resurrection is not just a name changer; it's also a life changer.

When Jesus rose from the dead, people's lives were changed. Peter who three times had denied Jesus when things got tough as Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and then taken to trial, and from there to the cross. Disgraced indeed, but when shortly after Jesus rose from the dead, he meets Peter on a beach and restores him, he too is back to life, and is charged to feed the sheep. Changed by his meeting with the risen Jesus, Peter rises to become a great apostle in the Early Church. Same for Thomas. He doesn't believe. "If I don't see the marks of the wounds, I wouldn't believe it" he says. And Jesus does just that. "Here, put your hand into the nail marks, Thomas." Everything changes. He believes. He, too, becomes a great apostle in the Early Church. He, too, is changed by the resurrection.

We don't know if Barnabas ever saw Jesus risen from the dead, himself. But it doesn't matter. The message of Jesus' resurrection the apostles proclaimed was powerful and life changing too. It changed Barnabas. Jesus, the risen Lord, came to him in that message, and Joseph of Cyprus became Barnabas, the encourager.

The same is true for us. The message of Jesus' resurrection changes us. Are you struggling with a sin? Jesus is risen from the dead! Your life is changed because whatever that sin is, you are forgiven. Are you doubting God's love? Jesus is risen from the dead! Doubt becomes faith strong once again, because his death was because he loves you, and the resurrection proves that was his plan.

Are you too easily angered? Jesus is risen from the dead! Relax and be calm in his peace and grace because he lives to take care of whatever upsets you.

Are you afraid of getting sick, losing your job, losing someone you love? Jesus is risen from the dead! He is with you always, no matter what.

Are you weak and heavy laden? Jesus is risen from the dead! He listens to the prayers you take to him.

Are you complaining and jealous of what others have and you don't? Jesus is risen from the dead! Contentment comes from the Lord, who lives to grant you rich supply.

Are you trying not even to think of your death? Jesus is risen from the dead! You, too, will rise, as will everyone who confesses him as did Peter, as did Thomas. Are you crabby and negative? Jesus is risen from the dead! He can change you to be a Barnabas.

Yes, you can be a Barnabas too. Just look at what Barnabas did. He had some property, a field. We don't know how big it was. We don't know how much he got for it. We don't know if he had other fields. Doesn't matter. What's important is that he did not consider that field as his own. No, he knew it was God's gift to him to use wisely. So, he sold the field and brought the money to the apostles. What was the money used for? For

those in need in the church. He saw that some people didn't have enough. He sold the field. He gave the money.

You can guess what the result was: the people in need were encouraged. Someone cared for them. Someone knew what they were going through and wanted to help. Someone was willing to give away what he had to make sure they had enough. You know who else was encouraged? Those in the church who watched Barnabas do this. They were encouraged that someone would be so generous. They saw that what they had wasn't their own either but was the Lord's gift to them. They gave too. In that church, at that time, none of the members was in need. Barnabas, the encourager, changed by the resurrected Jesus, helped make that happen.

Do you see what the resurrection looks like? It's the grace and power of Jesus working in Joseph's life so he'd get a resurrection new name: the son of encouragement. But he wasn't the only one.

We have other examples too, take for Paul for instance, who started many of the churches after Jesus rose from the dead. He wrote many books of the New Testament. But he was not always such a passionate proclaimer of Jesus' resurrection. No, at one time he persecuted the church, and he was good at it. He arrested people who were Christians. He was happy when some of the early believers were put to death because of their faith. But then he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. Everything changed. The persecutor became the proclaimer. He wanted everyone to believe in Jesus. Now, because not everyone believed he had changed, many were still afraid of him.

But do you know who helped pave the way for Paul to be accepted by the other disciples? Barnabas. He spoke up for Paul. He vouched for him and traveled with him. He put his life and reputation on the line for Paul. His words encouraged Paul. That encouragement could have been one of the reasons Paul became the apostle who started so many churches, who took the powerful message of Jesus' resurrection throughout the ancient world. Barnabas, the encourager.

Jesus' resurrection gives grace and power to change lives into encouragers with words and deeds of generosity.

Here we are today. We've heard the powerful message of God's grace. Jesus is risen from the dead. He is at work in our lives. He is changing us. We can each be a modern-day Barnabas.

What does that look like today? Barnabas spoke up for Paul. The words he used were words of encouragement. We can speak words of encouragement to one another too, here in the congregation, in our families, or with our neighbors.

We can speak words of appreciation too: "Your smile at work is so wonderful to see." "You did excellent work on that assignment." "Your care for your kids makes you so beautiful." "No, I won't help you bully her." "I'm coming over to keep you company tonight." "Loser? No way. You're God's unique creation." "You are loved by Jesus."

You don't like anything somebody else is doing? Approach them nicely. How and when do approach that person, can be the difference between encouragement and discouragement. Your words can be a gift to someone else, can build others up, can show care, that Jesus cares. Or they can show our sinfulness. But remember your sins are forgiven, then rejoice in that forgiveness and pray that the lord will bring you to smile and speak words of encouragement.

Barnabas also gave to those in need. It still happens in the church today. Last Christmas we saw some of that, as several families and individuals were helped by your generous giving. I'm sure the recipients were encouraged by that. Your offerings and contribution help farther the ministry of the church here and beyond. Why do we do that? We do so because Jesus has won life for us, because Jesus is alive and because he is alive, we too are alive. What else can become our greatest motivation if not the resurrection of Jesu Christ? Alleluia Christ is risen! Alleluia, he is risen indeed!

I know a man by the name of Wes Wagner, a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Vancouver who in 1981 donated his land to what

became the Wagner Hill Farms a center for addictions recovery, in Langley BC, fulfilling the Boehms dream to help people break free from addictions through hard work in the soil and through Jesus. Wes Wagner. Since 1981 they have helped over 5,000 men and women who by the resurrection power of Christ, have broken free from addiction. Two Barnabasess at work, Wes Wagner and Helmut Boehm.

Easter does indeed make a difference. Just as it did with Joseph of Cyprus who became a “son of encouragement.” So, it does with us too. And we can be children of encouragement too, we can indeed encourage others with words that build up and by the generosity we show. That’s the power of Jesus resurrection, it makes a difference, it changes our lives and indeed our names.

Easter does make a difference, indeed, because Jesus is risen from the dead. The risen Christ is the life changer indeed! Amen.